

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0233

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 1616

LIMDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, AR, ASEC

SUBJECT: SECURITY FOR AMERICANS

REFS: A. STATE 046669, B. BA 8102 AND C. BA 3085, 1974

FOR AMBASSADOR BOWDLER FROM AMBASSADOR HILL

1. THE KILLING OF CONSULAR AGENT JOHN PATRICK EGAN HAS
ONCE AGAIN DEMONSTRATED THE VULNERABILITY OF AMERICANS TO
TERRORIST ATTACKS. EVERY AMERICAN CITIZEN EMPLOYEE AT THE
EMBASSY BUENOS AIRES KNOWS THAT HE OR SHE IS, BY VIRTUE OF
ASSIGNMENT TO THIS EMBASSY IS POTENTIALLY THE TARGET OF A
FATAL ATTACK. THEY KNOW WHAT THE USG POLICY IS ON RANSOM IF SUCH AN
ATTACK COMMENCES WITH KIDNAPPING.

2. LONG BEFORE THE EGAN MURDER THIS EMBASSY TOOK THE SECURITY
SITUATION UNDER CLOSE AND CONSTANT REVIEW. THE EMBASSY
WATCH COMMITTEE NOT ONLY SCREENS THE INTELLIGENCE DATA
AVAILABLE TO KEEP ME CURRENT ON THE LEVEL OF RISK TO
AMERICANS, BUT ALSO EXAMINES ALL POSSIBLE WAYS AND MEANS TO
IMPROVE THE SECURITY OF THIS EMBASSY AND ITS PERSONNEL.

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AS YOU KNOW, SECURITY PRACTICES HERE UNDERWENT A MAJOR OVER-

HAUL AND, HOPEFULLY, IMPROVEMENT AFTER THE LAUN INCIDENT.

3. WE HAVE ENDEAVORED TO SECURE THE SAFETY OF OUR PEOPLE. I BELIEVE THAT EMBASSY BUENOS AIRES HAS TAKEN MEASURES WHICH AN EXTREMELY PRUDENT MAN WOULD UNDER THESE CONDITIONS AND WHICH WILL STILL PERMIT US TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE PROVEN TERRORIST ABILITY WE ARE NOT COMPLACENT. WE REMAIN FULLY AWARE THAT FOR THE FORSEEABLE FUTURE EVERY EMPLOYEE OF THIS EMBASSY IS A POTENTIAL TARGET.

4. WHILE TARGETTING OF OUR PERSONNEL CANNOT BE ENTIRELY ELIMINATED, WE HAVE SEEN ADVANTAGES IN REDUCING THE NUMBER OF POTENTIAL TARGETS. BUT THIS EMBASSY CANNOT BE CLOSED OR REDUCED TO A STAFF SO SMALL THAT IT COULD NOT PERFORM ITS ESSENTIAL DUTIES. TO DO SO WOULD BE TO SURRENDER TO THE TERRORISTS ONE LONG-TERM STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE, WHICH THEY STRONGLY DESIRE-ELIMINATION OR EMASCULATION OF THE USG PRESENCE IN ARGENTINA. THE UNITED STATES CANNOT AFFORD TO BOW BEFORE THE THREAT OF A GROUP OF FANATIC TERRORISTS.

5. FOLLOWING THE LAUN INCIDENT, THIS POST UNDERWENT A STAFF REDUCTION, PRIMARILY INVOLVING THE RELOCATION OF VARIOUS REGIONAL OFFICES. FOLLOWING THE MURDER OF THE FEDERAL CHIEF OF POLICE, THIS EMBASSY PROPOSED A FURTHER REDUCTION, WHICH WOULD BRING THE EMBASSY DOWN TO WHAT I JUDGE TO BE A MINIMUM PERSONNEL LEVEL NEEDED TO PERFORM EFFECTIVELY ITS BASIC FUNCTIONS. ON NOVEMBER 5, 1974, I RECOMMENDED(REF B) AN EMBASSY REDUCTION OF 26 POSITIONS OF WHICH THREE (3) WERE THEN VACANT. I URGED THAT AS MANY AS POSSIBLE DEPARTURES BE BY CHRISTMAS. AS OF NOW, ONLY 6 OF THE 23 HAVE DEPARTED, ALTHOUGH ORDERS ARE EXPECTED IMMINENTLY ON ONE OR TWO MORE.

6. THE PROBLEM OF NON-OFFICIAL AMERICANS RESIDENT IN ARGENTINA IS DIFFERENT THAN THAT OF OFFICIAL AMERICANS. THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 4,000 AMERICAN CITIZENS IN ARGENTINA. THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY WOULD NOT BE "SYMBOLICALLY SIGNIFICANT" AS POTENTIAL TARGETS IN OUR VIEW; NEVERTHELESS, WE ATTEMPT TO KEEP THEM ADVISED ON THE SECURITY SITUATION THROUGH AMERICAN COMMUNITY LEADERS BY WEEKLY AND MONTHLY MEETINGS OF SEPARATE GROUPS.

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7. MOST OF THE EXECUTIVES WITH LARGE AMERICAN FIRMS HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY. PERHAPS 40 TO 50 AMERICAN EXECUTIVES STILL REMAIN IN ARGENTINA, PERHAPS RELUCTANTLY, BUT UNDER GUARD. AT THE MARCH 5 WATCH COMMITTEE MEETING, THE FIRST SINCE THE EGAN MURDER, IT WAS RECOMMENDED THAT THE AMERICAN BUSINESS COMMUNITY BE BRIEFED ON THE LOCAL SITUATION. I WILL DO SO IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE AS WE HAVE

DONE TIME AND TIME AGAIN IN THE PAST.

8. OTHER WATCH COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS WERE, AND I CONCUR:

(A) THE EMBASSY, UNDER MY DIRECTION, REVIEW STAFFING PATTERS WITH A VIEW TOWARDS FURTHER REDUCING TO THE LOWEST LEVEL CONSISTENT WITH USG OBJECTIVES AND THE REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED BY THE CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION.

(B) PROVIDE AT LEAST MINIMAL GUARD PROTECTION TO ALL EMBASSY EMPLOYEES.

(C) INDIVIDUALS WILL STAGGER OFFICE HOURS BY AS MUCH AS TWO HOURS IN ARRIVING/DEPARTING THE CHANCERY IN A RANDOM PATTERN.

(D) THE DCM SHOULD BE PROVIDED WITH AN ARMORED CAR AND FOLLOW CAR.

(E) PROHIBIT PERSONAL TRAVEL TO ARGENTINA BY USG PERSONNEL. (DEPARTMENT REQUESTED TO NOTIFY POSTS AND AGENCIES)

(F) THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO DISCOURAGE PRIVATE US CITIZENS AND BUSINESSMEN FROM TRAVELLING TO ARGENTINA.

9. I ALSO CONCUR IN FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS BY SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE MADE ON FRIDAY MARCH 7:

(A) NO LEASES FOR EMBASSY PERSONNEL QUARTERS TO BE SIGNED UNTIL AN INSPECTION OF THE QUARTERS HAS BEEN DONE BY SECURITY.

(B) THAT OFFICIAL VEHICLES BE REPAINTED IN DIFFERENT COLORS TO AVOID EASY IDENTIFICATION; THAT TWO-WAY RADIO ANTENNAS BE CONCEALED; AND THAT NON-DIPLOMATIC LICENSE PLATES BE ISSUED TO INDIVIDUALS WHO DESIRE THEM IN LIEU OF DIPLOMATIC LICENSES.

(C) THAT THE NUMBER OF PATROL CARS IN SERVICE BE INCREASED.

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(D) A SYSTEM OF LOGS OF DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL TIMES BE KEPT BY SECTION ON A WEEKLY BASIS AND TURNED IN TO THE DCM EACH MONDAY.

10. I AGAIN REITERATE THE POLICY SET OUT IN REF C WHICH IS DESIGNED TO REDUCE THE DESIRE OF FAMILIES TO LIVE IN THE SUBURBS AND NEAR THE AMERICAN SCHOOL. NEW ARRIVALS, INCLUDING THOSE ALREADY IN POSSESSION OF TRANSFER ORDERS WILL BE REQUIRED TO LIVE INSIDE THE LIMITS OF THE FEDERAL CAPITAL.

11. I AM WITHHOLDING A DECISION ON CLOSING THE LINCOLN CENTER IN BUENOS AIRES AND THE THREE LOCALLY STAFFED USIS OFFICES IN CORDOBA, MENDOZA AND ROSARIO UNTIL I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY OF DISCUSSING THESE MATTERS WITH PAO WOODWARD AFTER HIS RETURN FROM THE CARACAS PAO CONFERENCE.

12. ON MARCH 5, CHIEF OF POLICE MARGARIDE PERSONALLY TOLD
ME THAT HE RECOMMENDED THAT ALL EMBASSY AMERICAN PERSONNEL
SHOULD CARRY A WEAPON, IN THE LIGHT OF THE CURRENT
SITUATION, I HAVE TAKEN NOTE OF HIS COMMENT. WOULD APPRECIATE
ANY NEW WASHINGTON GUIDANCE.
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